

THE ROLE OF PROMPTS IN EFL WRITING

A THESIS PRESENTED BY

GÖZDE AKMENEK

TO THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

BILKENT UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

Title: The Role of Prompts in EFL Writing

Author: Gözde Akmenek

Thesis Chairperson: Dr. Bill Snyder  
Bilkent University, MA TEFL Program

Committee Members: Dr. James Stalker  
Dr. Hossein Nassaji  
John Hitz  
Bilkent University, MA TEFL Program

One problem that teachers generally face is to choose prompts for EFL academic writing assessments or classroom practices. Studies show that the performance of students in writing is influenced by the choice of the prompts. This study investigated whether a prompt can cause a difference in overall quality and cohesion when it attempts to activate appropriate background knowledge of students, to provide students with enough guidance to the topic and also tries to make students think more on the topic..

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among types of writing prompts, cohesion and overall quality of EFL students' writings. In particular, the study aimed at investigating the possible effect of two different prompts, traditional and thought provoking, on the overall quality of a written product and the frequency of cohesive devices used in that written product. The traditional prompt is a prompt which broadly states the topic with a vague focus. The thought provoking prompt, on the other hand, is a prompt which attempts to make students think more on the topic without losing the focus of it. The secondary purpose was to see whether there was a relationship

between the number of the cohesive devices used and the overall quality of the written product.

Data were collected through two classroom applications at the Foreign Languages Education Department at Middle East Technical University. Thirty-eight advanced level students were asked to write about two different prompts in a timed writing test. The writing prompts described the same topic but differed in length, information load and wording.

Data were analyzed by employing descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics included the calculation of means and frequencies. The inferential statistics was conducted to investigate the effect of the two prompts on the overall quality and cohesion of the essays. The inferential statistics was also used to investigate the relationship between cohesion and the overall writing quality of the essays.

The results of the study showed that a prompt which tries to activate appropriate background knowledge, to provide enough guidance to the topic and to provoke thinking about the topic resulted in a better performance in overall quality. The results also indicated that the difference between the prompts caused no difference in the use of cohesive devices, and cohesion did not contribute to overall quality.

In the light of the findings, the research suggests that the lexical formation and the importance of the information about the topic presented through a prompt should be taken into account in EFL writing and testing.

BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
MA THESIS EXAMINATION RESULT FORM

July 7, 2000

The examining committee appointed by the Institute of Economics and Social Sciences  
for the thesis examination of the MA TEFL student

Gözde Akmenek

has read the thesis of the student.

The committee has decided that the thesis of the student is satisfactory.

Thesis Title: The Role of Prompts in EFL Writing

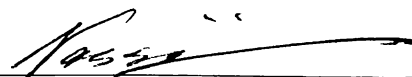
Thesis Advisor : Dr. Hossein Nassaji  
Bilkent University, MA TEFL Program

Committee Members : Dr. James Stalker  
Bilkent University, MA TEFL Program

Dr. Bill Snyder  
Bilkent University, MA TEFL Program

John Hitz  
Bilkent University, MA TEFL Program

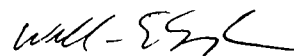
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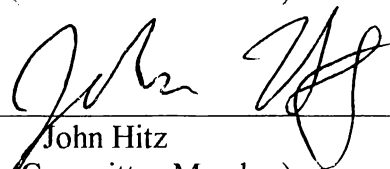
Dr. Hossein Nassaji  
(Advisor)



Dr. James Stalker  
(Committee Member)

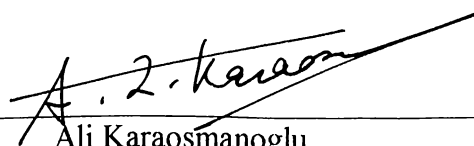


Dr. Bill Snyder  
(Committee Member)



John Hitz  
(Committee Member)

Approved for the  
Institute of Economics and Social Sciences



Ali Karaosmanoglu  
Director

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I dream, therefore I become.

To my beloved mother and sister,  
who inspire me to realize my dreams.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the possible relationships among types of writing prompts, cohesion and overall quality of EFL students' writings. In particular, the study aims at investigating the possible effect of two different prompts on the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality of a written product. The secondary purpose is to see whether there is a relationship between the number of the cohesive devices used and the overall quality of the written product.

Writing in a second language is one of the most complex skills to be learned by students. This skill is taught as a separate course in most academic institutions. The written texts which are produced by students consist of certain rhetorical and syntactic features of essay writing. EFL students seem to have difficulty producing well-organized essays. According to my seven-year teaching experience, students usually pay more attention to grammatical structures rather than to the content and discourse structure of the essay as they write in a foreign language.

One reason for the students' paying less or no attention to content and discourse might be the types of prompts used. The writing prompts my students and I have worked on for many years are not very informative. Prompts which present information about the topic to be developed in writing may be able to provide more guidance to students.

There have been numerous studies on prompts in writing (Brossell, 1983; Chistea & Oshea, 1988; Hirokawa & Swales, 1986). These studies include research which has explored the types of prompts, their lexical formations and length, and how students perceive them. Hayward (1990), for example, looked at the relationship between lexical formation of prompts and the nonnative students'

choices in response to the length and wording of the prompts in essay texts and found that the lexical formation and length of prompts both have an important effect on students' written products. Besides, it has been suggested that if we make students think more during writing activities, which can be done by giving them a more thought provoking prompt, students can produce better writing (Williams, 1996) . This assumption is based on the idea that the more students think over a problem, the more they focus on its solution. Indeed, researchers have explored the significant effect of the amount of thinking on the work that people produce and pay attention while writing (e.g., Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Lachman, 1979). It is suggested that causing learners to act in a manner which limits their thinking can result in drawing limits on their potential for more effective performance (Langer, 1997).

The notions of prompts and their effects on learners' writing performance can be investigated by studying cohesion of a written text (Witte & Faigley as cited in Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) as well as the overall quality of the text. In other words, cohesive links between sentences in a written text can be an indicator of students' using their skills to generate new ideas and organize them accordingly. Witte and Faigley stress that cohesion can be a sound indicator of differences in students' invention skills. Cohesion is a semantic concept which refers to relations of meaning that exist in a text, and makes it possible to call it a text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Cohesion in a written text can indicate how information is linked within the sentences at discourse level rather than at sentence level, which took more attention in the past (Silva, 1990).

If a given prompt causes students to think more, and provides students with enough guidance into the topic before they put their thoughts and ideas into words,

students can work more on the organization. In addition, students may need to use some connectors to link and organize their thoughts. Therefore, there might be a relationship between prompts and cohesion. In other words, if a prompt makes students think more over the topic and lets them make their own choices in syntax and semantics, students will have the chance to add information of their own and make their own organization. While organizing their thoughts and ideas, students may feel the necessity to put them in a logical order as they think about the choices of ideas and grammatical structures. Therefore, there might be a relationship among the kind of prompt and overall quality and cohesion of the text.

#### Statement of The Problem

I have experienced as a teacher that writing skill for EFL teachers and students has been the most problematic skill to be mastered. The paragraphs and essays which are written by students need to be composed of ideas which are connected fluently and logically. However, in EFL writing, students have difficulty organizing sentences while presenting their ideas according to a logical sequence using suitable connectors and following certain cohesion rules, and their writings seem to lack depth. In other words, although the students practice the rules of cohesion and the components of a paragraph, and an essay step by step starting from the sentence level, their writing ends in written lists of sentences rather than a well connected text. Furthermore, students also practice certain techniques of brainstorming, such as mind mapping, but this does not always change what they produce at the end. The students encounter the same problem when they pursue their further academic studies. The overall quality and connections between sentences and ideas seem to be

illogically ordered or loose. EFL students usually have problems with expressing or organizing their ideas, which results in a failure in academic writing.

Can this problem be the result of the writing prompts given to the students as the starting point of their writing? This is the main question addressed in the study. Because the prompts given in the course book, in the classroom exercises, and in the examinations do not guide students about the topic they are expected to write, and the prompts present vague ideas about the topic, the students may pay less attention to content and discourse and try to build the content out of an unclear topic introduced in the prompt. These prompts may not capture the students' interest and may not make them think more profoundly about what to write and how to write. On the other hand, if a prompt is worded in such a way that it could let the students think more about what to write and how to write, the outcome may be different.

In brief, the problem of paying less attention to content and discourse could result from the prompts which may not provide students with enough guidance for the content and discourse of the topic. Traditionally, prompts which have been used in EFL classrooms in Turkey have been prompts which were simple in form and focus. That is why I called these prompts "*traditional*". Therefore, it is worthwhile to empirically investigate the extent to which these prompts are effective on students' writing in comparison to other prompts which are clearer in form and focus.

### Significance of The Study

Writing is a very important issue as academic institutions allocate a considerable amount of time to writing and seek to find new methods and techniques to teach writing in order to enable the students to write more meaningfully and more cohesively. In addition, EFL teachers try to find the possible reasons for students'

problems with cohesion and depth in terms of overall quality. Therefore, the role and effect of prompts on writing should be investigated for the purpose of better writing performance in terms of overall quality and cohesion.

In addition, the studies investigating the relationship among writing prompts, overall quality and cohesion are rare in the field of foreign language writing. Studies have focused on either the relationship between prompts and overall quality or the relationship between cohesion and overall quality. Thus, the effect of writing prompts on the overall quality and cohesion has been less investigated; therefore, studies are needed to investigate the interrelationship among prompts, cohesion and overall quality. This can contribute to the ongoing argument in the field of foreign language writing about the relationship among these three elements.

If a significant relationship between a prompt which enhances better quality and more cohesive writing is found, it may prove that prompts play an important role in writing. In addition, it can affect the way EFL writing is perceived; and it may help teach creative writing as it consists of profound thinking, organization, and revision.

### Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

- 1) Do thought provoking prompts lead to significant differences in the overall quality of writing as opposed to traditional prompts?
- 2) Do thought provoking prompts lead to significant differences in the frequency of the cohesive devices used in writing as opposed to traditional prompts?



3) Is there any relationship between cohesion and overall quality of a written text?

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

This section provides the theoretical background of the study by presenting information about the writing ability, EFL writing and the features of EFL writing and a summary of previous studies. The features of EFL writing discussed are the features of prompts, overall quality and cohesion. Two writing process models are also presented and discussed.

Writing is a language skill which enables a writer to communicate his thoughts and ideas with readers by using his language abilities and knowledge in a written form. That is, it is a means of communication and a tool to express thoughts and ideas about a certain topic in a written form. Also, writing makes a special contribution to the way people think, learn and develop their world view in terms of discovering their way of perceiving concepts and issues around them and developing their thoughts and views about the world (Axelrod & Cooper, 1991). When people write, they compose meanings and create an intricate web of meaning in which sentences have special relationships to each other. Composing meaning and presenting it in a web of sentences require thinking. Writing also helps people learn more effectively and think more critically. It enables people to link their knowledge with the new information and by finding similarities and differences between old and new information they learn to judge and think over the information in their hand and the new information they encounter. By writing, people can realize their way of thinking about a topic or their world view in general. This can cause a better understanding of one's self.

### EFL Writing

Writing gains more importance in the field of EFL. Writing, like speaking, is a skill by which knowledge can be displayed and transferred by using the language which is mastered as a foreign language. The students who are educated in a foreign language are involved in various studies related to their major field study. The activities and studies they are involved require a lot of writing. They have to comment on what they learn or to report on what they investigate either in spoken or written form. Whenever they need to comment or report on what they have learned or investigated in their subject fields, they are to do it in an appropriate writing style. In other words, they need to use writing as a tool to express their thoughts and ideas. For example, if they want to argue a topic, describe what they have experienced, make an analysis, discuss causes and effects of a particular topic, or discuss particular concepts in their fields, they need to use writing to share their thoughts and ideas with the other members of the academic society.

In order to perform the requirements of writing in a foreign language, EFL students should learn and practice the rhetoric features of composing thoughts and ideas, or the features of the components of writing, such as the parts and sequence of these parts in an essay or an article and the features of each part which turns into a whole written product at the end. EFL educators give importance to writing as they want their students to fulfill the needs of becoming efficient writers, interpreters, researchers and thinkers in their fields and want them to be able to meet the requirements of becoming a member in the EFL society. Unless EFL teachers give enough importance to writing, their graduates are not accepted as efficient teachers,

researchers or academicians. Tichy (1988) argues that academic institutions, their curriculum designers or teachers are the ones to blame if a student or a graduate is not successful in writing. She adds that if scientists, technologists, engineers or any professionals cannot express their thoughts and ideas in their fields, their education in writing should be questioned.

In writing, thoughts and ideas need to be communicated in a certain form and structure. In educational research, writing is accepted as a productive skill which needs to be valued and practiced as it is a true representation of the correct forms of language (Biber, 1988). While learning and practicing writing, in general, students should learn how to organize and synthesize information and to write intelligently and effectively. In other words, they need to learn how to express their thoughts and ideas in a meaningful and organized way. Learning the format and organization of writing needs special training. From the sentence level to the complete essay format, students should practice how to express the knowledge they wish to express.

In writing, the presentation of information on a particular topic usually follows a certain format. For example, a good essay involves a thesis statement including controlling ideas for each paragraph, supporting idea(s) for each controlling idea and so forth. So students should learn how to organize sentences, one after another for the purpose of fluency and unity in a written product. In addition, students should learn how to respond properly to a given topic in a certain form of writing. They need to study the rhetorical and syntactical features of writing to compose their thoughts and ideas appropriately. For instance, they should write properly to narrate a topic, to write about a process, to describe an event, or to make arguments. Thus, in order to write properly, students should learn how to organize

their thoughts and knowledge by practicing the features of academic writing.

Hammond (1989) states that students learn how to organize 'chaotic mass of information' (p.1) while studying writing.

How the information is organized on a paper is related to how the information is organized in students' minds. In other words, the mental representation of the topic to be written can be a factor for the organization and the quality of writing seen on the paper. Therefore, writing goes through two main stages. One stage is the organization studied and practiced by students to put their thoughts and ideas clearly on the paper, and the other stage is the mental processes that students go through before putting their words and sentences on the paper.

#### Theories of the Writing Process

The way a writer establishes certain links within and between sentences and the organization of topic in a written passage can be seen as a reflection of thoughts and ideas in a writer's mind (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). In other words, a written passage can be seen as a reflection of the mental representation of a topic in a writer's mind and the organization of that mental representation. This argument can be supported by the theories of writing process which deal with the successive stages that occur in the mind as the writer encounters the stimulus. Two writing process models are considered here, one is a knowledge-telling process model for inexperienced writers (Figure 1) and knowledge transforming process model for more experienced writers (Figure 2) (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p.121,122). These models illustrate what kind of stages a writer goes through until he is ready to put his ideas into words and sentences and the points which cause these stages to work properly.



The first model, the knowledge-telling process model, is composed of seven main stages. The first stage is the mental representation of the assignment. This stage refers to the picture or the conceptual reflection of the topic formed in the writer's mind as soon as he encounters and understands the writing prompt. If this starting point is achieved successfully, it triggers the following stages which are locating topic and genre identifiers. The second stage, locating topic, is the part of the process where the given topic is previously established in the mind. After locating the topic, the appropriate genre is selected simultaneously. The third stage, constructing memory probes, helps the writer start recalling familiar background knowledge according to the mental representation. The fourth stage is retrieving content from memory using probes. This stage enables the writer to construct an appropriate content by bringing the information reached by the memory probes together. The fifth stage is running tests of appropriateness, where the writer checks whether the memory probes recall appropriate knowledge matching the mental representation of the topic. Then, in the sixth stage, the writer starts putting his ideas and thoughts into chunks of phrases or sentences and puts whatever has been recalled on the paper. In the seventh and final stage, the writer updates the mental representation of the text and composes his ideas and thoughts. Although the model presents writing as a linear process, there are also two important components which accompany every single stage: discourse knowledge and content knowledge. These two components can efficiently be used when the writer is familiar with the topic. In other words, unless the writer has the relevant discourse and content knowledge previously stored in the form of memory probes in his mind, the topic will remain

unknown to him. Therefore, he will not be able to recall relevant information as it does not previously exist in his mind.

The second model is the knowledge-transforming process model. This model represents a more complex thinking process for more advanced writing. It has four main stages. The first stage is the mental representation of the assignment, which is like the same stage in the knowledge-telling process model. The second stage is analyzing the problem, or the topic, which deals with the comprehension of the topic or clarifying what the topic asks for from the writer. The third stage is setting the related goals. The goals are related to the choices made by the writer about the discourse structure and content of the topic. The problem is analyzed as a content problem and a rhetorical problem. To solve these two problems, the writer needs content and discourse knowledge. After solving the problems by using appropriate knowledge, or recalling appropriate content and discourse, the writer moves onto the next stage, which is the translation of the problem. At this stage, when the problem about the content or rhetoric is figured out and solved, the output of one becomes the input of the other, which enables the writer to proceed to the final stage, which is the knowledge-telling stage. At this stage, the writer is ready to activate the writing process. If the writer encounters any problem or mismatch between the mental representation of the topic and the composition of his ideas and thoughts in the written form, he moves back to the second stage, problem analysis and goal setting. Therefore, this model follows a cyclic pattern.

These two models share certain stages. One of them is the starting point of the process which is the mental representation of the assignment. In other words, the initial stage which activates the process indicates how the writer perceives and

interprets the given topic in his mind. Therefore, the topic or the assignment which functions as a stimulus for the expected topic to be written plays an important role for the output which is the written product in this case. Hence, according to the models, different prompts might have different effects on the quality of writing.

An important stage in the structure of knowledge-telling process model is the stage at which content is retrieved from memory. The type of prompt given in an assignment can affect this stage as well. It can help students become familiar with the topic and this can cause students to activate their previous knowledge about the content. If these stages are established and the memory probes are constructed well by means of a prompt, the information that is retrieved from memory can be better associated with the topic, and thus can be coherent by association with the topic and could be unified by an appropriate organization of the recalled thoughts and ideas. In short, if a system of relationships or networks between the stimulus and what already exists in the mind is established, this system will characterize the mental processes which comprise thinking. Therefore, stimulating students to think over a topic can be helpful for them to build that system of relationships, which may lead to thoughtful writing (Lachman et. al., 1979).



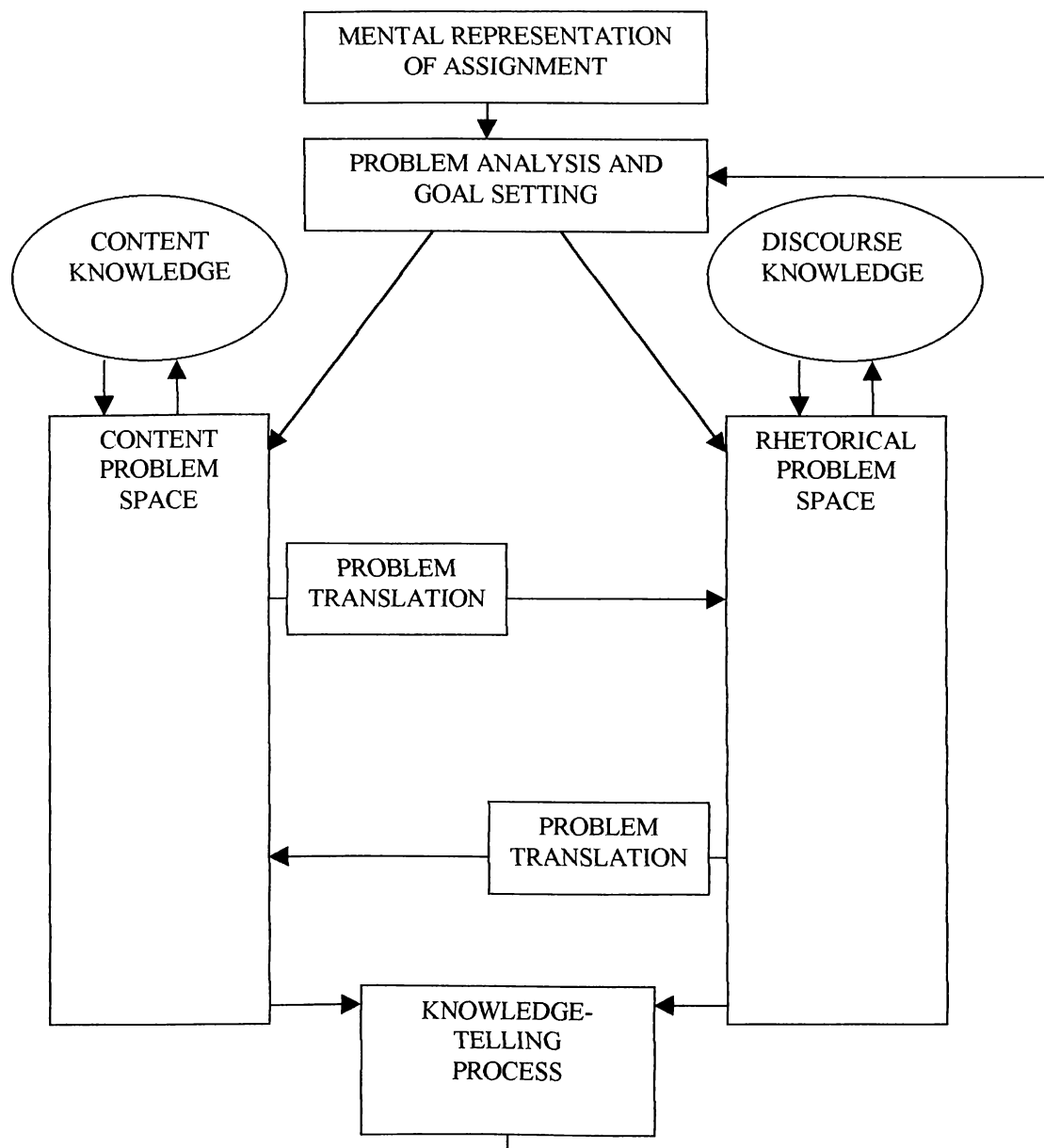


Figure 2. Structure of Knowledge-transforming Process

### The Role of Prompts in EFL Writing

In writing, before students start putting their thoughts and ideas into words, they clearly need to know what they are asked to write about. In other words, thoughts and ideas that students are supposed to compose about a topic should be



clear in their minds. At this point, the given topic should be a part of students' knowledge so that they can create a clear image of what they are asked to write about in their minds and build up on their previous knowledge. The purpose of helping students combine old information with the new information is to activate their previous knowledge within a presented situation or a set of circumstances and also to enable them to have a clear picture of the topic that they are to write. In other words, if students are familiar with the topic on which they are asked to write, the mental representation of the topic will be clearer in students' minds and they can easily build up on their previous knowledge about the topic.

In EFL environments, besides the three skills of speaking, reading and listening, students are frequently assessed on the basis of the writings they produce in response to various writing topics in a variety of circumstances. In practice and testing situations, the stimulus to which students respond in their writing is referred to as a prompt (Kroll & Reid, 1994). Kroll and Reid (1994) discussed three different formats in which prompts can occur:

1. A bare prompt, which is written in direct and simple form, states the entire task for the candidate. That is, the gist of the topic is given in a simple form without further clarification. 'Capital Punishment. Discuss.' or 'Do you favor or oppose the goals of the women's liberation movement in the United States?' are two examples.
2. A framed prompt, which presents a certain situation or a set of circumstances, and a task is presented based on the interpretation of the frame. It is exemplified below:

- a. Some people feel that using animals for food is cruel and unnecessary, while others feel that it is necessary for people to eat meat, and the production of animals for food can be done without cruelty. What is your position on the issue of whether people should use animals for food? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of both positions and use concrete examples when you explain and defend your point of view.
  - b. It always strikes me as a terrible shame to see young people spending so much of their time staring at television. If we could unplug all the TV sets in America, our children would grow up to be healthier, better educated, and more independent human beings.
3. A text-based or reading-based prompt, which is given right after a two or three-page reading, asks for student's interpretation of the text. For example, a passage of authentic (or adapted) reading material ranging in length from one paragraph to several pages is presented to the candidates, and the candidates are then asked to write an essay which demonstrates either his ability to interpret the content of the reading or to use ideas in the reading by applying them in ways directed by the prompt (p.233).

Kroll and Reid (1994) mention that words which are used in the formation of a prompt have to be chosen very carefully because they may mislead students and result in misinterpretations. They state that the words which compose prompts should be unambiguous to students. They also argue that prompts have to have a clear focus on the task which will be written by students. While making the focus of the task clear to students, prompts should not be too specific to cause students to produce stereotypical written products. Besides this, if there is too little specification

in the given prompt, students may not have a focus in their written product and this may cause students to have difficulty making their point clear throughout their writing. Leading within prompts can be done by using “cue words” which make the focus of the task clear to both students and raters (Horowitz, 1991). Thus, the lexical formation of prompts plays an important role in the clarification of the topic.

In addition to the lexical formation of a prompt, its length also seems to be an important factor. The role of the length of prompts has been investigated in different studies and support has been reported for longer prompts. For example, the reactions of the students to the length of prompts were studied by Chiste and O Shea (1988) by making informal interviews with intermediate ESL students and also by looking at students’ performances in their essays. In this study, students wrote two essays about a short and a longer prompt. The results of the study indicated that students got higher marks on the essays which were written for the longer prompt.

Also, Brossell (1983) investigated the length of prompts in terms of its “information load”. A prompt with ‘loaded information’ is a kind of prompt that provides students with enough information about the topic. In this study, the students were given two types of prompts on one topic to be written in forty minutes and their products indicated that they performed better for the prompt with ‘loaded information’. Brossell found a significant result in his study which showed that the “information load” in an essay topic had a discernable effect on the quality of student writing on timed examinations.

Another study was conducted by Gee (1985). This study indicated that longer, more complex prompts correlated with higher marks. Intermediate students were given a short and a longer prompt about the same topic. They were asked to

choose one and write an essay in a limited time. The results obtained by informal interviews showed that the students tended to choose the shorter prompt. Gee concluded that simple declarative sentences might appeal in their easiness at first sight but ultimately offered less insight into an essay's development and structure. On the other hand, longer prompts might provide more direction which made students concentrate more easily. In addition to these results, the interviews with the students showed that the students had found the longer prompts clearer in terms of their guidance to the topics.

Writing prompts and student reaction to them were also studied by Hirokawa and Swales (1986). They categorized prompts into two groups: simple and academic. They made this categorization by taking both lexical formation and length of prompts into consideration. They examined the extent to which more ambitious and more academically appropriate writing could be elicited by simply increasing the level of formality of the topic. They illustrated the simple and academic topic variants as follows:

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Simple    | Would you prefer to be part of a large family or a small one?   |
|           | Discuss.  |
| Academic: | Family size tend to vary according to a number of factors, such as, culture, religion, mortality rate, and level of economic development. What are the advantages and disadvantages of small "nuclear" families as opposed to larger extended family units? |
|           | State your personal preference for one of these family  |

types and explain the reasons behind that preference  
(p. 344).

These two prompts resemble the classifications done by Kroll and Reid. The “simple” prompt seems to be the “bare” prompt which is short and simple but its “academic” variation is similar to the “framed” prompt. They made informal interviews with the students who wrote about both prompts in a two-week interval. The students declared that they had found the academic prompt easier to understand and added that it was clearer than the simple prompt as it explicitly said what they were asked to write about, so it made the focus of the task clear to them. So, the researchers concluded that the first type of prompt less academic due to its lexical formation and length whereas they define its variant as a more academic writing prompt.

#### Familiarity with The Topic

The purpose of writing unambiguous prompts in terms of lexical formation and providing students with detailed information in longer prompts is to help students become familiarized with the topic (Horowitz, 1991). Also, if familiarization is maintained by avoiding ambiguous expressions in a given stimulus, students can activate their knowledge about a given topic more easily by enabling the related part of their memory to recall a clear picture of the required topic (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

When the definitions of the “framed” prompt and the “academic” prompts are analyzed, it can obviously be seen that they are similar in terms of their attempt to make students familiar with the task before they start writing. The effect of familiarization can be explained by the argument that students perform most

successfully when the writing prompt and the topic is stimulated by a prompt activate students' background knowledge (schema) (Bereiter & Scardamalia cited in Kroll & Reid, p. 235). Bereiter and Scardamalia claim that students write best about what is familiar. By making students familiar with the topic, the prompt can cause students to find certain common points between the topic and themselves. In addition, the level of familiarity can be increased by presenting a situation or a set of circumstances beforehand in order to help students use the presented information to combine their previous knowledge with the given information. The level of familiarity can also be increased by asking students to include their own way of understanding or interpreting the topic. The result of this can cause them to get more involved in what they write.

In a study Perl (1980) found that students wrote more and with greater fluency when their writing involved them personally, but they wrote with less fluently when the writing was more objectified. That is, the more personally students get involved in the topic, the more fluently they write. Another study on writing prompts was conducted by Johns (1986). She carried out the study with her students in her writing class. Her study consisted of two main parts. The initial stage dealt with the way that the students perceive prompts, and the second stage was to see whether students could produce better products in terms of cohesive elements and overall quality as a result of better understanding of prompts. In the initial stage of her study, Johns asked her students to work on the writing prompts in two stages: deconstructing and reconstructing the prompt. First, she wanted her students to deconstruct the prompt by dividing it into pieces in order to understand better the directions and limitations of their assigned task. She made her students divide the

prompt into pieces by giving them three questions to answer about the prompt. These questions were organized from general to specific. The questions respectively asked the general understanding of the prompt, i.e., by questioning what the prompt writer wanted the students to write about, what writing strategies were required and what the aim of the prompt was, and finally, the identification of the focus of the prompt. With the help of these questions, the students became more familiar with the topic as they worked on the prompt in a detailed way. After getting the answers, she asked her students to reconstruct the prompt by rewriting it with their own words. So, the researcher concluded that if students are able to deconstruct and reconstruct the given prompt, it might indicate that the students can understand the prompt well. This also indicates that the prompt is well-written and clear enough for that particular audience to write about the topic. The second main stage of her study was related to cohesion in which she analyzed the relationship between prompts and cohesion. This section of the study will be discussed in the following section in more detail.

### Cohesion in Writing

In writing, students should learn how to organize their thoughts in a logical order in order to express their thoughts and ideas in an organized way. Therefore, they need to practice features used for making the combination of ideas and thoughts clear to the writer, and to maintain fluent and meaningful series of expressions to maintain fluency in their ideas. One of the means by which linking pieces of information and sentences to get a fluent and meaningful whole in a paragraph or essay can be achieved is cohesion.

Cohesion is defined as the way certain words or grammatical features of a sentence can connect a given sentence to its predecessors and/or successors in a text

(Hoey, 1991). Hoey states that the reader can interpret meaning by looking at the surrounding sentences using these words or grammatical features as guidance. In other words, these words or grammatical features in a sentence help the reader find his way throughout a series of sentences. Harris (1993) has a more concrete view of cohesion. He states that cohesion can be achieved by the use of lexical chains which are a series of related vocabulary items.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesion as relationships of meaning that exist within a text and defines it a text. Moreover, in a text, when the relationship between sentences is clear and when the transition from one sentence to another is easy and natural, that text is said to have cohesion. In this case, the flow of meaning in a text is enhanced by cohesion, which makes the reader follow the thoughts and ideas of the writer easily when they are presented in a logical order (Ata, Bener, Gökeri, et. al., 1982). When a series of sentences are written one after the other, those individual sentences have to be related. This relation can explicitly be built by using appropriate connectives which bring pieces of meaning together to make a whole. The use of connectives within and between sentences and paragraphs imply the semantic relationship throughout a text. These connectives are referred to as key words and phrases which exist throughout a passage (Daiker et. al., 1994). Connecting key words and phrases throughout a passage helps a reader follow the series of thoughts of a writer (Axelrod & Cooper, 1991).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to cohesive devices as 'ties' (p. 3). A tie is defined as a single instance of cohesion, a term for one occurrence of a pair of cohesively related items. According to Halliday and Hasan, the cohesive devices or ties are mainly categorized into two types: Grammatical and lexical cohesive



devices. The former occurs within the sentence structure as it is determined and formed depending on the structure of the sentence while the latter occurs in between the sentences and are not formed independent from the structure of the sentences they connect. The ties which are used for grammatical cohesion are reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunctions.

Referencing, which indicates a semantic relationship, is referring to certain elements within a sentence which cannot be interpreted on their own. These elements make reference to other elements in their surrounding to be interpreted. In English, there are three types of reference: personals (pronouns and possessives), demonstratives (*this, that, these* and *those*) and comparatives (identity, similarity, difference, numerative and epithet). Due to semantic relationship, the referencing element does not belong to the same grammatical class of the element that it refers to. Unlike referencing, substitution is the relation in the wording rather than in the meaning. It can be done under strict grammatical conditions. A substitute word has to match the grammatical class that it substitutes. Substitution is divided into three groups: nominal substitution using *one/ones*, verbal substitution using *do*, clausal substitution using *so*. The third group of grammatical cohesion is ellipsis.

Substitution and ellipsis are very similar to each other. Halliday and Hasan define ellipsis as 'substitution by zero' (p. 142). Like substitution, ellipsis does not indicate meaning but structural relationships. The final grouping in grammatical cohesion, according to Halliday and Hasan, is conjunctions. Halliday and Hasan state that it is in fact difficult to make a concrete distinction for conjunctions in whether they belong to grammatical or lexical grouping of cohesion. However, they believe that conjunctions do not only focus on the semantic relations as realized throughout the

grammar of the language, but on one particular aspect of them, namely the function they have of relating to each other linguistic elements which occur in succession but are not related by other, structural means. Halliday and Hasan have grouped conjunctions under certain names: additive (*and, in addition, furthermore, etc.*), adversative (*but, yet, however, etc.*), causal (*so, thus, hence, etc.*), temporal (*then, afterwards, after that, etc.*) and continuative conjunctions.

The second main category according to Halliday and Hasan is lexical cohesion. This cohesive effect is achieved by the selection of appropriate vocabulary. The difference between grammatical and lexical cohesion derives from the 'general noun' (p. 274). The use of general nouns as cohesive agents depends on their occurring in the context of reference. The occurrence of general nouns as cohesive devices within a context is called reiteration which is the repetition of a lexical item. This can be done by using synonymy, near-synonymy, or superordinate.

Another general categorization of cohesive elements is done by Hartnett (cited in Couture, 1986). She has gathered cohesive elements under two names: static and dynamic ties. She classifies cohesive elements in such terms due to the difference in the 'maintenance' and 'developmental' (p. 144) functions of cohesive elements. The cohesive elements with maintenance function are static whereas the ones with developmental function are dynamic. The static ties refer to the cohesive elements that hold the attention on the topic without manipulating or changing it. These ties include the repetition of the same lexical item, demonstratives, third-person pronouns, definite articles, nominal, verbal and clausal substitution and ellipses, continuative conjunctions, synonyms, near-synonyms, antonyms, collocations and

parallel grammatical structures. These static ties, as Hartnett classifies, maintain attention on a topic.

On the other hand, to express rhetorical manipulation of the topic, dynamic ties can be used. According to Hartnett, the dynamic ties can be formed by many kinds of text features. These ties include temporal conjunctions which support chronological arrangement and sequence of tenses in narration, lexical superordinates which identify high-level logical relationships, hyponyms which indicate low-level logical relationships like specifications, causal conjunctions which indicate reasoning from cause to effect, adversative conjunctions which express contrasts and comparative and superlative forms of adjectives and adverbs which turn the focus on comparison and contrast. Dynamic ties indicate how a writer manipulates the topic and instead of repeating an idea, these ties indicate how the idea develops and changes or relates to something else. In other words, dynamic ties give direction to the flow of ideas throughout the text. Hartnett concludes that unlike static ties, dynamic ties are optional and sparse. A thoughtful expression of an idea is possible without them. The same idea can be expressed by using a verb, for example, instead of using a conjunction. Furthermore, if they are overused, they may complicate prose unnecessarily.

Rankin (1984) argues that cohesive ties are a kind of indicator which enables a reader to access the content. She adds that cohesion as a linguistic notion provides explicit entrance into the processing of written text as well as to its production. In addition, the kinds and frequencies of certain cohesive devices may reflect a student's skill of invention, the ability to discover what to say and cohesion analysis can help distinguish stages of writing development and might provide methods of explaining

concretely some of the differences between good and poor writing (Witte & Faigley cited in Couture, 1986). Furthermore, in some writing course books, cohesive elements are introduced as a complementary quality to coherence and unity of a paragraph or text.

Gallo and Rink (1973) state that although unity is a basic structural component of good writing, unity alone, without the help of certain other qualities, cannot ensure a successful writing. In their book, they provide a section for explanations and exercises about cohesive ties for college students. In this section, presenting several paragraphs lacking cohesive ties, Gallo and Rink try to illustrate how a paragraph can lose its meaning and how meaning cannot be conveyed without cohesive ties. In another writing course book prepared by Glendinning and Mantell (1983) the first three chapters are devoted to explanations and exercises about meaning and grammar links in paragraphs. The function and use of these links are presented by providing a series of sentences to students and asking them to replace those linking elements in between those sentences. Besides such exercises, a discussion section after a new linking word is practiced is given to make students discuss the meaning difference (if any) which occurs after putting those linking words into right places. This enables students to figure out how a message in writing can be transferred to a reader as a meaningful whole by means of putting the pieces of that message together using linking words. The last five chapters of the book deal with different genres but still help students form their paragraphs by using those meaning and grammar links to establish a genre at the end. In other words, the message in the paragraphs is conveyed with the help of those linking words and the content which is presented as a

whole is written in a certain genre, such as descriptive, argumentative, and explanatory writing.

The classifications done above reflect different perceptions of the same concept. It can be concluded that cohesion helps the pieces of ideas and thoughts put into sentences and paragraphs follow a logical order to maintain fluency and a meaningful whole at the end.

### Prompts, Overall Quality, and Cohesion

Maintaining a meaningful whole by organizing the ideas and thoughts in a logical way can reflect the quality of writing. The overall quality of writing is a deeper level rather than a sentence level feature. The ideas and thoughts are expressed by following certain stylistic features which comprise the overall quality and composition of the ideas and thoughts as a whole. The overall quality of writing reflects how the message is expressed throughout the paper. It also reflects how the main idea is supported or argued, how fluently and logically the main idea is presented via the thesis statement, topic sentences, supporting statements, and how it is developed and concluded throughout the paper. These steps also contain the matter of paragraph organization, vocabulary use and sentence formations and the links and transformations between and among sentences and paragraphs. In brief, overall quality of writing is a whole which is built piece by piece by means of components of writing (Meriwether, 1998). Witte and Faigley (1981) defined overall quality of a text as the 'fit' (p. 200) of a particular text into its context in which writer's purpose, the discourse medium, and the reader's knowledge about the topic are involved. In other words, overall quality does not only depend on the features that a text involves but it also includes certain outside factors, such as the reader,

context and to what extent the text has a complementary effect as a meaningful whole within the context it is presented.

There have been various studies carried out to investigate the relationship among prompts, overall quality and cohesion, and the relationship between cohesion and overall quality. The relationship between prompts and overall quality was investigated by Way and Joiner et al. (2000). In the study, they used three different writing tasks (descriptive, narrative and expository) and three different writing prompts (bare, vocabulary and prose model) and received 937 writing samples written by 330 novice writers. The purpose of the study was to see the difference that prompts and various writing tasks could cause on the overall quality, fluency, syntactic complexity and accuracy. They used holistic scoring to evaluate overall quality of the papers. The findings of the study revealed that the prompt given in the prose form resulted in the highest overall grades among the three prompts for the three writing tasks.

As mentioned before, Johns (1986) investigated the effect of prompts on cohesion at the second stage of her study. After making her students apply the two steps of deconstructing and reconstructing the given prompt, she asked them to write about it. Then, she analyzed the coherence of the written product by looking at the cohesive ties between the sentences and unity. Although the cohesive ties between the sentences and unity in a written passage could be analyzed independently, Johns found in her study that cohesion could be analyzed as being a complementary factor of coherence of the text. In this respect, Johns found support for her results that cohesion could be studied as a complementary factor of the overall quality of a text (see Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Another study investigating the relationship between the frequency of cohesive devices and the prompts, and the relationship between the prompts and the overall quality of written passages was done by Reid (1992). Her study consisted of four groups of students from different language backgrounds: Chinese, Arabic, Spanish and English. Her aim was to analyze and compare the effect of types of topics and prompts and four cohesive devices, pronouns, conjunctions, subordinate conjunction openers and prepositions, within and between four groups of students. She analyzed 638 essays written by these students. Each student wrote an essay for every topic and prompt. The two topic types were comparison/contrast and description and interpretation of a chart/graph and the prompts for the former topic type were about space and leisure, and the prompts for the latter topic type were about farming and continent. First, she analyzed the overall quality of the written products for each topic type and for each language group. The results of holistic scoring indicate that the topic types did not make any significance difference in the overall quality of the written passages for each language group. The results about the frequency of cohesive devices for each topic type in every language group indicated that the co-occurrences of four cohesive devices did not indicate any significant difference within language groups between the topic types. Reid concluded that despite the differences among the language backgrounds, the co-occurrence of these four cohesive devices was consistent between the two topic types. However, she stated in her study that further research was needed to investigate the co-occurrences of cohesive devices in English writing by nonnative speakers of English.

As it is suggested by Reid further studies on co-occurrences of cohesive devices should be done. In addition, the studies investigating the relationship among

the prompt types, overall quality and cohesion are to be found rarely in the field of second language writing. Either the relationship between prompts and overall quality or the relationship between cohesion and overall quality has been investigated in the field. The possible effect of two different prompts written for the same topic on the overall quality and on the frequency of cohesive devices needs further studies in order to make certain generalizations in the field. Furthermore, an additional part to that kind of a study can be carried out to investigate the possible effect of cohesion on overall quality, which seems to be an ongoing argument in the field of second language writing. The studies done on the relationship between prompts and overall quality suggest that prompts providing more guidance seem to end in better writing in terms of overall quality.

Whether cohesion contributes to overall quality of writing is discussed by researchers in the field. There are two main opposing views. Some researchers like Halliday and Hasan (1976), Hartnett (1986), and Johns (1986) claim that cohesion is the indicator of a network of ideas presented in a written passage; therefore, cohesion does have an effect on overall quality. On the other hand, some researchers like Widdowson (1978), De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) and Carrell (1982) argue that cohesion and overall quality of a written passage are two independent features to be analyzed, so cohesion is not an indicator of overall quality.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) state that by means of cohesion, the whole meaning of a text is built sentence by sentence, i.e., the semantic relation among sentences leads to a meaningful whole. Halliday and Hasan call that meaningful whole a 'texture'. They state that a text can be called 'a text' if it has texture, i.e., if the semantic relation is built between sentences. Texture causes a text to function as



a unity with respect to its environment. Unity can be obtained by cohesion which occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another.

In response to meaning, if it exists in relations, words that signal relations are important for writers. If a writer can meaningfully express these relations which he has built in his mental process, the written product will imply 'coherent meaning'. Coherence expressed partially through cohesion, expresses the meaning existing in relations.

Hartnett is one of the researchers who is in favor of the idea that cohesion contributes to overall quality. She tested the effect of the use of cohesive elements on the quality of writing. Her study involved a classification of cohesive devices as static and dynamic, and the effect of each group's on overall quality. The reason why she divided the cohesive ties into two groups as static and dynamic was to indicate their difference in terms of their effect on the quality of writing. She compared the frequency of cohesive ties with the holistic evaluation of the student papers. She found that poorly constructed cohesive ties or lack of these ties within and in between the sentences affected the overall quality of the written text negatively as they correlated with lower marks in her study. She states that cohesive ties have an effect on the coherence and unity of a written text. She carried out the research to see the effect of cohesion on the quality of a written text and concluded that each group of cohesive devices had an effect on overall quality. She finds support for Halliday and Hasan's work *Cohesion in English* as they define a text to be meaningful within its texture.

Johns (1986), as mentioned above, has looked at the relationship between cohesion and overall quality of a written text in her research and found that cohesion plays an important role in judging the overall quality of a text. She highlighted the point in her study that when looking at such a relationship in a written text, raters or teachers should not only look at the use of cohesive elements without identifying their function in composing the topic. Otherwise, it might mislead raters and teachers. In other words, if cohesive elements within or between sentences are used appropriately, they may indicate a better quality in writing.

Another study which investigated the relationship between cohesion and overall quality was done by Witte and Faigley (1981). They conducted the study by analyzing 90 student essays by taking Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomies as criteria to investigate the frequency of cohesive devices and its relation to the overall quality. The essays were rated holistically and the cohesive devices occurred in each essay were counted and their percentage was taken over the total number of words in each essay. The results of the study showed that cohesive devices were more frequently used in high-rated essays than the number of cohesive devices occurred in the low-rated essays. Witte and Faigley concluded that cohesion and overall quality interacted to a great degree but the overall quality cannot be evaluated by the features included in a text but the reader's expectations and knowledge about the topic should also be taken as criteria for the judgement.

However, there are some researchers who argue against the idea that cohesion can contribute to the overall quality of a written product. Widdowson (1978) argues that it is quite possible to encounter a written product which involves no instances of cohesion but is still entirely unified and coherent in itself. He defines cohesion as

‘the overt, linguistically-signaled relationship between propositions’ (p. 31). He defines coherence, on the other hand, as a relationship between illocutionary acts. According to his definitions, it is obviously seen that cohesion is not a sign of a semantic relation in a written work. It also does not add anything to coherence, and therefore, to unity and overall quality of a written product. A similar approach to cohesion in a text is shared by De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). Taking cohesion as one of the qualities of writing, De Beaugrande and Dressler argue that cohesion needs to be studied separately from coherence and unity of a text. They see cohesive ties as the components of the surface text and coherence and unity as the components which ‘underlie’ (p. 4) the surface text. Therefore, from their explanation, it can be concluded that configuration of concepts and relations which can be signaled by coherence and unity are the components for judging the overall quality of a text. In other words, coherence indicates the formation of ideas and thoughts which bring about the meaningful whole or the overall quality of a text.

Another argument about whether cohesion contributes to the quality of a written text is made by Carrell (1982). She suggests that cohesion is not an indicator of a good or poor quality of a written text. Carroll claims that cohesion does not concern what a text means; it concerns how a text is constructed as a semantic structure. There is another argument about the relationship between cohesion and overall quality of a written text. Contrary to taking cohesion as a cause of coherence and quality of a text, it is seen as an effect of maintaining unity in a text. In other words, when coherence is maintained, cohesion is its natural result, not its cause.

Morgan and Sellner (1980) argue that coherence and unity of a text are a matter of content which happens to have linguistic consequences. These

consequences involve cohesive ties. This idea emerges from the schema theory which is related to information processing in cognitive science. Bobrow and Norman (1975) define this theory as an interactive process between the text and the prior knowledge or memory schemata of the listener or reader. In brief, the overall unity of a text can be judged according to the listener or reader's perception and understanding of the text. Therefore, a distinction between cohesion and unity of a text can be made by taking the writer and reader of a text separately. The writer may start from cohesive devices to build the meaning of the whole text but the reader perceives the content as a whole without dividing the meaning into pieces. In other words, a text is formed in an inductive manner whereas it is interpreted in a deductive manner.

Coming from this point of view, Morgan and Sellner see cohesion as one of the tools of a writer to construct the semantic structure of a text and the components of coherence and unity as tools of a reader to interpret the text depending on his prior knowledge and memory schemata about the content.

In conclusion, the contribution of cohesion to coherence and unity of a written text has been discussed by researchers. Their views indicate that cohesive ties signal the mental process of a writer who builds the meaning throughout a text in the light of those ties. Those researchers argue that cohesive ties can serve as an indicator of writing quality as they indicate the way that a writer follows to convey the meaning throughout the text. Therefore, they claim that cohesion can be taken as a criterion to judge the quality of writing. It can help teachers or raters as readers to distinguish good writing from bad writing. On the other hand, the views which disagree with the notion that cohesion can be a sign of the quality of a text. They claim that cohesion

and quality of a text have to be analyzed separately as the former does not do any effect on the latter. They argue that while cohesive ties help a writer form the external structure of a text, the components of coherence and unity help a writer to form the internal quality of a text.

The studies carried out in the field of EFL writing on the effects of prompts on overall quality and cohesive devices are not sufficient in number to provide enough evidence for the role of prompt. The research done regarding the effect of cohesion on overall quality is not adequate in number, either. It does not specifically indicate that such an effect does exist in general. In addition, the issues of the contribution of cohesion to overall quality needs further investigations since investigations reviewed show that one view may not be able to disprove the other view. Therefore, the number of studies carried out in this field let the topic remain in a contradictory status.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the possible relationships among writing prompts, cohesion and overall quality of EFL students' writings. In particular, the study aimed at investigating the possible effect of two different prompts on the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality of a written product. The secondary purpose was to see whether there is a relationship between the number of the cohesive devices used and the overall quality of the written product.

#### Participants

This research was conducted in the Foreign Languages Education Department (FLE) at Middle East Technical University (METU). There were thirty-eight participants who were native speakers of Turkish. Thirty-two of them were female and 6 of them were male and their ages ranged from 18 to 29. The participants were advanced EFL learners.

The English proficiency level of the students were determined on the basis of a proficiency test which was given to them two years before the study was done when they entered the university. The proficiency exam was prepared by The Department of Modern Languages and Department of Basic English at METU. The passing grade for this exam is 60 out of 100. When students get 60 or over 60, they are accepted as qualified to pursue their academic studies in their departments. The proficiency exam results for this group of students ranged from 61.50 to 90.50, which indicated a high level of proficiency.

The following table displays detailed statistical information about the participants.

Table 1

Background Information About The Participants

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	St. Deviation
Age	18	29	20.24	1.76
Proficiency Exam	61.50	90.50	74.71	8.24

As it can be seen in Table 1, the mean of the proficiency exam results is 74.71. This indicates that the sample's level of English proficiency is advanced.

The reason why I conducted this research with highly advanced EFL students was that due to their high level of English proficiency, these students were much more competent and successful in constructing grammatical structures in English to express their thoughts and ideas than the students at lower level of proficiency. Besides, they might have a wider range of vocabulary which could help them express themselves better. These two points were essential to reduce the possibility of poorly constructed sentences in terms of grammar and also to reduce the possibility of difficulty for the raters to figure out the meaning which is expressed in poorly constructed sentences and wrongly chosen vocabulary. In other words, instead of dealing with the severe grammar mistakes and wrong vocabulary, the raters were able to deal with higher-order writing processes such as cohesion and overall quality, which was the purpose of the study.

This study was conducted in two sections of the same course. This was done to avoid the risk of one classroom's being particularly affected by classroom conditions, such as the number of students in each class and the teachers' teaching style. There were also two teachers from the Department of Basic English (DBE),

METU who rated the writing papers. One teacher was teaching the intermediate level students and the other was the researcher herself. As the students were from a different department, and therefore completely unknown to the raters, the reliability in rating was expected to be high.

### Materials and Procedure

To collect the data, first of all, I chose 10 writing prompts which had been prepared by the testers of the upper-intermediate level in DBE and used as essay examination prompts in the writing section of the mid-term examinations of the same level in the past two years. Then, I contacted the upper-intermediate level tester who prepared those prompts. She helped me choose 5 prompts out of those 10 depending on the students and teachers' comments on those prompts. The 5 prompts we chose were the ones which were accepted as raising more interest in students and those which students did not have much difficulty writing about. These prompts were considered as traditional prompts.

The reason why I called the writing prompts given in the writing section of the mid-term examinations and used in classrooms as exercises 'traditional' was that most of the writing prompts used in the beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate levels in DBE share the same characteristics. First of all, the prompts asked for stereotype writing products. They also did not seem to provide students with the chance to express their own personal opinions or experience while elaborating the topic. For example, in a writing prompt used in an elementary level mid-term examination, students were asked to look at 6 pictures and write down what two friends did on holiday in the previous year. The prompt required students to use the simple past tense and find a verb for an action they saw



in each picture and used the second form of those verbs correctly in a sentence for each picture. They were also asked to use the appropriate time expressions for the simple past tense. Another prompt used in the intermediate level mid-term examination required students to describe the Self-Access Center, where the students study English, listen to tapes and watch videos in English. Students were required to make the physical description of that room. They were expected to make this description starting from left or right hand side. These two prompts can be given as examples of the first type of the traditional prompts.

The second reason was that, the prompts seemed to provide little information or guidance because of their wording. In spite of the fact that it worked well with some students who were considered as good writers by their teachers, most writing papers got low grades in content organization and the main idea was not clearly expressed or supported due to the weak organization of ideas in those papers (personal communication with 3 testers, 10 teachers and 2 coordinators). For instance, a prompt like “Write about the most important considerations in choosing an occupation” (1998-1999 Fall semester upper-intermediate second mid-term examination) could easily end in list of ideas which did not have any link between them, so lacked fluency as it did not clearly suggest a focus on the topic. As English proficiency of the students get higher towards the upper-intermediate level and English proficiency of the upper-intermediate level students is accepted to be quite high, writing prompts are given in this way, especially in this level.

Then, I worked on those five prompts by rewording them. I tried to make them more thought provoking for the students. After having 5 original prompts and their variants ready, I made the definition of traditional and thought provoking

prompts. I reworded 5 prompts and tried to put them in a style which could help students understand the topic by asking further questions to the students about the topic. The purpose of doing so was to make students think more on the topic without losing the focus of the topic. While rewording the prompts, I used Kroll and Reid's (1994) suggestions regarding 'framed prompts' (p.233) as a guide. A framed prompt presents a certain situation or a set of circumstances, and a task is presented based on the interpretation of the frame. The thought provoking prompt, on the other hand, is different from a framed prompt in its construction. Two questions were asked to the students to elicit information about the topic and the verb 'think' is repeated in sentences and questions to stimulate the students to think more on the topic.

After that, I gave those 10 writing prompts (5 original prompts and their thought provoking versions) with the definitions of the traditional and thought provoking prompt to 3 upper-intermediate testers, 3 teacher trainers and 10 teachers on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January. The aim of this process was to learn about the general attitude towards the definitions and classifications of the writing prompts from testers who work on writing prompts, teachers who applied these prompts in the classrooms and directly encounter the feelings of the students towards writing prompts in general and teacher trainers who give practical suggestions about teaching writing besides the other skills.

I asked them to classify the prompts into two groups: traditional and thought provoking after reading my definitions. I also asked them to comment on my definitions and the prompts. These people were asked to list their own reasons for calling them traditional and thought provoking if they had made such a distinction.

The prompts, their definitions, the way I asked the participants to classify the prompts into two are found in Appendix D.

The reasons that the participants gave were homogenous in content. They reported that they found certain prompts thought provoking as further questions about the topic within the prompts could help test-takers understand the topic more efficiently without losing the focus of the topic. The participants had four days to think over the prompts and to report their choice and the reason(s) for the choice. They were asked to do the classification and reasoning individually without discussing any point related to the survey with someone else.

The results indicated that the teachers and testers agreed with my definitions and thoughts about the distinction between the traditional and thought provoking prompts. They confirmed that thought provoking prompts due to their wording could help students activate knowledge and seemed to provide students with guidance by making the focus of the topic clearer. They also added that thought provoking prompts could help students express their own point of view about the topic more easily when compared to the traditional prompts.

The final point the teachers made was that the thought provoking prompts were formed in a similar way that they taught writing. Two teachers stated that students usually wasted a lot of time to maintain a focus for their content without writing down anything on their paper. In other words, students spent their time deciding on where to begin and what to write. Consequently, they added that thought provoking prompts could help students concentrate more on content organization and help them have more time to reread and revise what they had written than wasting their time to decide on the focus of their writing. On the other

hand, the teacher trainers stated that they did not agree with my definitions and comments about the distinction I had made between the traditional and thought provoking prompts and they found the traditional prompts more thought provoking because they believed that students had to maintain the focus of the topic by themselves when they were tested. However, they still believed that the use of brainstorming and elicitation techniques to make understandable to the students. That was why they believed that there was no need to make the writing task easier for students in the exams by providing them with more specific information about the topic.

After the process of deciding on the thought provoking prompts, I chose one of them (one original and its variant) to use in my research. To determine the type of cohesive devices used in the essays, a checklist consisting of the type of cohesive devices suggested by Kies (1999) was devised (Appendix A). The checklist (Appendix E) includes devices such as repetition of words or phrases, synonymy, antonymy, pro-forms, collocation, enumeration, parallelism and transitions referring to opposition, addition, cause and effect, indefinites, concession, and exemplification.

The raters read the papers and marked each type of cohesive element by putting a dot into the related box in the checklist. I asked them to put a cross for the third cohesive element belonging to the same type. While counting the cohesive elements in a student paper, the raters also put a dot for each wrongly used connective, i.e., for each cohesive element which did not maintain the meaning link within or in between sentences correctly.

I also piloted the checklist with two teachers in DBE on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January. Having marked the cohesive elements in a writing paper of an intermediate student by putting dots and crosses into the related boxes in the checklist, the teachers stated that they did not have difficulty using the checklist.

#### Data Collection

Two prompts were chosen from the list of traditional and thought provoking prompts. The study was conducted at two writing classes at FLE, the students were asked to write an argumentative essay on each prompt. In order to avoid the order effect, the order of prompts were counterbalanced. I divided each class into two halves. While one half wrote about the traditional prompt, the other half in the same classroom were writing about the thought provoking prompt. The other classroom was treated in the same way. A week later, the same prompts were given using the same procedure but this time the order of the prompts were reversed and the students wrote about the prompt that they had not written before.

Forty minutes was given to the students to write their essays and 10 minutes was given to them to complete the background questionnaires (Appendix C). After a week, they wrote their second essays in 40 minutes, they got 5 minutes more to fill in another questionnaire (Appendix F) asking mainly about their comments on the two prompts they had already written. Two class hours for each section were allocated for this research within a week interval.

#### Data Analysis

After collecting the data, I looked at the relationship among the kind of prompt and cohesive devices and overall quality of the written products. The frequency of the cohesive elements were found by looking at the results in the checklist for each

paper. To measure the overall quality of the texts, the holistic scoring scheme of writing, which is being used in DBE, is used (Appendix B).

To rate the papers for the overall quality, holistic scoring was done. Hamp-Lyons (1993) mentions four widely used methods of assessing writing: The first method of writing assessment is Primary Trait Assessment. In this method, the raters focus on the written product only in terms of judging it whether it is good or not in reference to a predetermined context of a particular writing assessment. Therefore, when a written product for a particular prompt is to be assessed, a primary writing trait is to be determined each time and relevant measuring items are reorganized in accordance with particular assessment criteria. This assessment method is also called as 'focused holistic' (Hamp-Lyons, p.247).

The second method is Multiple Trait Assessment. This method enables raters to focus on more than one trait which are determined on the basis of context-appropriate or content-appropriate criteria. Different from Primary Trait Assessment, this method can be applied for various prompts which fulfill initial design criteria of prompts determined as measurement criteria. Primary Trait Assessment and Multiple Trait Assessment are found to be more beneficial for students as they provide students with feedback. In these methods, the purpose of diagnosis could be maintained. The other assessment method is Portfolio Assessment, which has been used more than the other methods recently as it enables raters to see the gradual improvement of writing skill of a student. This method provides raters with enough information to decide whether a student is qualified to get a passing grade at the end of the term.

The last method of assessing writing is holistic assessment, which is used in this study. This method is used to get the overall impression about the quality of writing, and is one of the methods which has become quite popular among institutions. In this method, a group of individual readers' impression on the overall quality of a written product is taken as the result of the measurement. To make the measurement more reliable, it is better to use previously determined criteria for the expected outcome. By means of such criteria, the readers or raters behave less subjectively and less intuitively. That's the reason why two independent raters were assigned for the assessment of the papers for the overall quality.

The papers were graded according to holistic scoring and the 5-1 scale was used for marking the papers. In the holistic grading scale, 5 stands for the 'very good' band and seeks for the qualities of rhetorical features. It indicates a well-organized set of ideas presented at introductory, body and concluding paragraphs. 4, in the scale, stands for the 'good' band, which looks for similar qualifications to the 'very good' band; and 3, in the scale stands for the 'adequate' band, which looks for connectedness in at least two thirds of the essay, mostly appropriate style, grammatical errors in about half of the essay not affecting communication. 2, in the scale, stands for the 'weak' band, which looks for serious lacking points which are mentioned in the higher bands; and finally, 1, in the scale, stands for the 'very poor' band, which refers to lack of basic knowledge of English and lack of basic paragraph/essay conventions.

The raters at the DBE were asked to rate the papers interdependently and evaluate the papers in terms of cohesion and overall quality of the texts. The teachers from DBE were trained to become familiar with counting the cohesive

elements in a text by working on a sample text received from an upper-intermediate level student. However, because the writing grading scheme which is the one used for overall grading of the texts at DBE, and the raters are two teachers from the same department, they did not need any training for evaluating the overall quality of the text. The raters read and evaluated the papers during April and May.

After the two raters read and evaluated the papers in terms of both cohesion and overall quality, I compared the grades given by the two raters. When the grades were compared, it was seen that the grades given by the two raters did not show any significant difference as mentioned above. The reliability analysis was done to calculate the inter-rater reliability by applying inter-item correlation. Its result indicated a strong reliability between the grades.

After doing the reliability analysis, the two scores given for the two raters for each essay were added and averaged in order to arrive at an index for the overall quality of the essays. To arrive at an index for the frequency of the cohesive devices used in the two sets of essays, the percentage of the cohesive devices was calculated by dividing the occurrences of the cohesive devices by the total number of words in each essay. Calculating the percentages of the cohesive devices was preferred as the length of each essay was different.

Then, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was run to see the difference between the overall quality grades for two prompts. Then, a 2-tailed paired t-test was run for the analysis to see the difference between the frequencies occurred at essays written for two prompts. Then, the relationship between the overall grades and the frequencies of cohesive elements was analyzed by correlating the grades and



frequencies of cohesive devices for two prompts. The data analysis was finished at the beginning of June.

## CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of writing prompts on overall quality and cohesion in EFL writing. This study investigated three main research questions. The first question was to see the possible effect of two different writing prompts on the overall quality of EFL writing, and the second one was to see the possible effect of the two different writing prompts on the frequency of cohesive devices in EFL writing. The last question the study investigated was the relationship between the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality of the essays written for the two different prompts.

The two prompts were named traditional and thought provoking prompts. The traditional prompt presented the topic very broadly and briefly. It was similar to ‘*bare*’ and ‘*simple*’ prompts as suggested by Kroll and Reid (1994) and Hirokawa and Swales (1986), respectively. On the other hand, the latter one, thought provoking prompt, tried to provide students with more information about the topic in an attempt to activate appropriate background knowledge and to make the focus of the topic clear to students. The thought provoking prompt was similar to the ‘*framed*’ and ‘*academic*’ prompts in lexical formation and length as suggested by Kroll and Reid (1994) and Hirokawa and Swales (1986), respectively.

Seventy-six essays were written for the two prompts. These essays were written by 38 students each writing an essay for each prompt. Two independent raters rated the overall quality of the essays according to a holistic grading scheme, whose scale ranged from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good).

The inter-rater reliability for the raters was calculated by conducting an inter-item correlation analysis. The inter-rater reliability coefficient of the traditional prompt was 0.96, which shows a strong reliability between the two independent raters in rating the overall quality of the essays. The inter-rater reliability coefficient of the thought provoking prompts was 0.98, which indicates that there was a high reliability between the two independent raters in rating the essays written for the thought provoking prompt.

Then, in order to arrive at an index for the overall quality of the essays, the two scores given for the two raters for each essay were added and averaged. To arrive at an index for the frequency of the cohesive devices used in the two sets of essays, the percentage of the cohesive devices was calculated by dividing the occurrences of the cohesive devices by the total number of words in each essay. Calculating the percentages of the cohesive devices was preferred as the length of each essay was different.

To see the effect of the traditional prompt and thought provoking prompt on the overall quality of the essays, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was conducted. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test is a within-group nonparametric statistical test used to compare paired-data coming from the same subjects. Then, a 2-tailed T-Test was used to see the possible difference between the frequency of cohesive devices used in the essays written for the two prompts. To investigate the relationship between cohesion and overall quality of the essays written for the two prompts, Pearson Product-Moment correlation was conducted.

### Results of the study

As mentioned above, certain statistical analyses were conducted to arrive at the results. Initially, the means and standard deviations of the overall quality scores and the percentages of the frequencies of the cohesive devices for the two prompts were calculated. The results are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2

#### The Means and Standard Deviation for Overall Quality.

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Traditional Prompt	38	1	5	2.36	1.03
Thought Provoking Prompt	38	2	5	3.39	.83

Note: *n*= Number of essays

As Table 2 shows the mean of the overall quality of essays for the traditional prompt is 2.36 and for the thought provoking prompt is 3.39. This shows that the essays written for the thought provoking prompt got higher grades in overall quality.

Table 3

#### The Means and Standard Deviation for Cohesive Devices.

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Traditional Prompt	38	15.93	39.96	26.14	5.32
Thought Provoking Prompt	38	13.97	42.06	28.15	6.76

Note: *n*= Number of essays

As Table 3 shows the mean of the frequency of the cohesive devices used in the essays for the traditional prompt is 26.14 and for the thought provoking prompt

is 28.15. This might suggest that neither of the prompts caused any great difference in the frequency of the cohesive devices.

#### Effect of Thought Provoking Prompt and Traditional Prompt on Overall Quality

In order to see whether there was any significant difference between the effect of the thought provoking prompt and to that of the traditional prompt on overall quality of the essays, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was conducted. As mentioned before, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test is a within-group nonparametric statistical test used to compare paired-data coming from the same subjects. The results of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test for the difference between the thought provoking and traditional prompts in terms of the overall quality of the writings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

#### Difference Between Thought Provoking Prompt and Traditional Prompt for Overall Quality.

	<i>n</i>	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Negative Ranks	1	3	3
Positive Ranks	30	16.43	493
Ties	7		
Total	38		

Note: *n*= Number of essays

Z= -4.86

p < .001

As can be seen in Table 4, there was 1 (Negative) essay out of 38 (total N) which got a higher grade for the overall quality written as a response to the traditional prompt. On the other hand, 30 (Positive) essays out of 38 got higher

grades on the thought provoking prompt. There were also 7 (Ties) essays out of 38 which got the same grade for the overall quality on both thought provoking and traditional prompts. As the table shows, the mean rank of the positive ranks is much higher than the negative ranks. The Z value is  $-4.86$ , which is significant at the level of .001. This indicates a highly significant difference between the thought provoking prompt and traditional prompt in terms of their effect on the overall quality. This suggests that the thought provoking prompt resulted in better performance in EFL writing in terms of overall quality when compared to the performance in the essays for the traditional prompt.

#### Effect of Traditional Prompt and Thought Provoking Prompt on Cohesion

In order to determine whether there was a significant difference between the means of the number of cohesive devices for the traditional prompt and thought provoking prompt, a 2-tailed paired t-test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

#### Difference Between Mean Percentage of Frequencies of Cohesive Devices for Traditional and Thought Provoking Prompts.

	<i>N</i>	Mean	St. Deviation	t-value	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Traditional Prompt	38	26.14	5.32	-1.34	37	.18
Thought Provoking Prompt	38	28.15	6.76			

Note: *n*= Number of essays

As can be seen in Table 5, the mean percentage of the frequency of cohesive devices for the traditional prompt was 26.14. The mean percentage of the frequency of cohesive devices for the thought provoking prompt was 28.15. The standard

deviation of the frequency of cohesive devices for the traditional prompt was 5.32, and the standard deviation of the frequency of the cohesive devices for the thought provoking prompt was 6.76. The t-value was  $-1.34$ , which indicated no significant difference. The results suggest that the thought provoking prompt did not cause any increase in the frequency of cohesive devices used in essays when compared to the instances of the cohesive devices used in the essays written for the traditional prompt. In other words, the results for the second question reveal the fact that the two prompts do not produce any significant effect on the frequency of cohesive devices used in EFL writing.

#### Relationship between Overall Quality and Cohesion

In order to determine whether there was a relationship between the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality of the essays for the two prompts, correlation analyses were conducted using Pearson Product-Moment correlation.

The results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

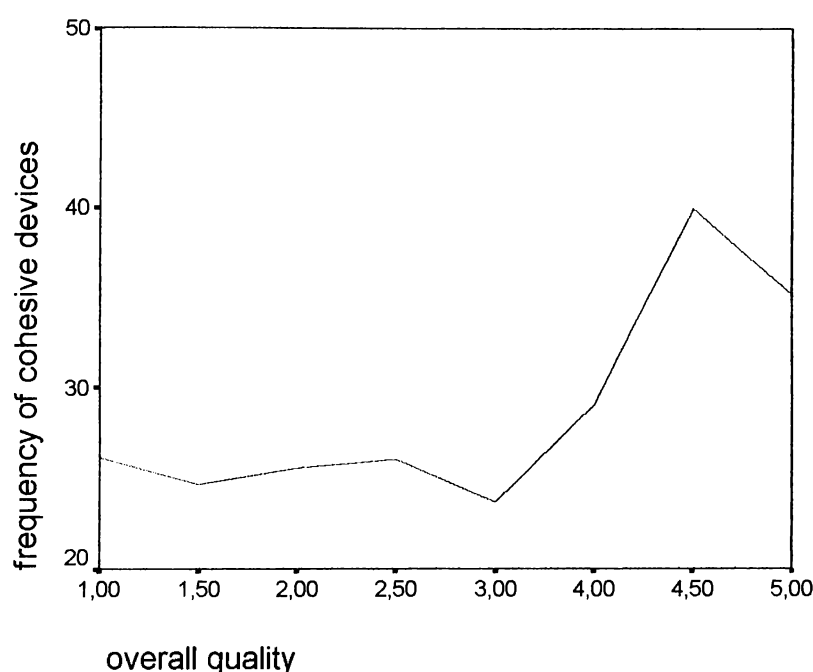
#### Relationship between Frequency of Cohesive Devices and Overall Quality

	Traditional Prompt	Thought Provoking Prompt
Correlation	.28	.04
Sig. (2-tailed)	.81	.77

As Table 6 shows, the correlation between the frequency of the cohesive devices and the overall quality of the traditional prompt was .28. This result indicated that there was not a significant correlation between the frequency of

cohesive devices and overall quality for the traditional prompt. This suggests that cohesion did not seem to contribute to the overall quality for the traditional prompt.

However, in order to probe the data further, the relationship between the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality for the traditional prompt was analyzed using the mean frequency of cohesive devices and the mean of the overall quality for individual subgroups. The results of this analysis is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** The Relationship Between Frequency of Cohesive Devices and Overall Quality for Traditional Prompt

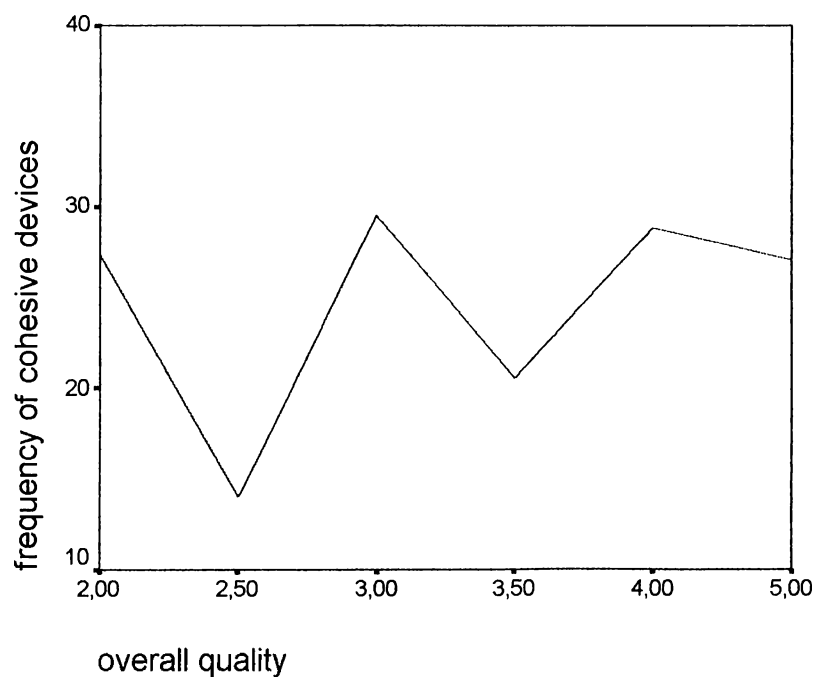
Although the correlation between the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality for the traditional prompt was low in general, Figure 3 indicated that the relationship between the mean of the percentage of the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality grades for each individual subgroup was different. The relationship was almost lower for those who got from 1 to 3. However, a higher



relationship can be observed for those who got higher scores on the overall quality for the traditional prompt (e.g., 3-5).

As for the thought provoking prompt (see Table 6), the correlation between the frequency of the cohesive devices and the overall quality was .04. This did not show a significant correlation, which suggests that cohesion did not seem to contribute to the overall quality for the thought provoking prompt, either.

However, in order to probe the data further, the relationship between the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality for the thought provoking prompt was analyzed using the mean frequency of cohesive devices and the mean of the overall quality for individual subgroups. The results of this analysis is presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** The Relationship Between Frequency of Cohesive Devices and Overall Quality for Thought Provoking Prompt

Although the correlation between the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality for the traditional prompt was low in general, Figure 4 indicated that the relationship between the mean of the percentage of the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality grades for each individual subgroup was different. The relationship observed in the graph fluctuates from 2 to 5 for the overall quality scores.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships among writing prompts, cohesion and overall quality of EFL students' writings. In particular, the study aimed at investigating the effect of two different prompts in an essay examination on the overall quality and frequency of cohesive devices of a written product and the secondary purpose was to see whether there was a relationship between the frequency of the cohesive devices and the overall grade given for the quality of the written product.

### Summary of The Results

To investigate the effect of the thought provoking prompt and traditional prompt on the overall quality of the essays, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used. The results indicated a significant difference between the effect of the thought provoking traditional prompts on the overall quality of the essays. That is, the essays written for the thought provoking prompt got higher grades than the essays written for the traditional prompt.

This may indicate that the thought provoking prompt provokes may help students organize their thoughts and ideas better. Also, the thought provoking prompt might have been more successful in maintaining the mental representation of the topic as suggested as the starting point of the writing process in the two writing process models (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). It seemed to be easier for the students to construct related memory probes to recall related knowledge about the topic.

Another reason could be that the thought provoking prompt might have provided the students with more information about the topic. This interpretation is consistent with the idea that Brossell (1983) mentioned. He pointed out the

importance of “information load” in the prompts. He found that the prompts which involve more information about the topic resulted in better performance in the overall quality especially in timed examinations. Also, Hirokawa and Swales (1986) conducted a study about the lexical formation and length of prompts. The ‘*academic*’ prompt was compared to the ‘*simple*’ prompt. The two differed in their lexical formation and length. The ‘*academic*’ prompt led to no ambiguity in terms of its lexical formation and it was also long enough to contain adequate information about the topic. The results of the study indicated that the students found the ‘*academic*’ prompt easier to understand and it was clearer than the ‘*simple*’ prompt as it explicitly said what they were asked to write about. This led the students to understand the focus of the topic clearly as well.

The results were also consistent with what Way and Joiner et. al. (2000) found about the role of prompts. Way and Joiner found that a prompt written in the prose form, which provided enough guidance to students and guide students appropriately about the topic resulted in better overall quality in writing.

To conclude, the results of the studies mentioned above and the results of my study reveal that prompts which activate appropriate background knowledge and contain enough information to provide guidance to the students may result in better performance in overall quality in writing.

The second research question investigated the difference between the frequencies of the cohesive devices occurred in the essays written for the two different prompts. The result of the 2-tailed paired t-test indicated no significant difference between the frequencies of the cohesive devices occurred in the essays written for the two different prompts. In other words, the students did not tend to use

cohesive devices more frequently in the essays they wrote for the thought provoking prompt than in the essays they wrote for the traditional prompt. This result can indicate that the way the students composed their ideas and thoughts and the way they linked their ideas and thoughts using the cohesive devices did not vary in response to the different ways of presenting the same topic by means of two different prompts. In other words, this result shows that the difference between the prompts does not have any significant effect on the use of cohesion.

A similar result was found by Reid (1992). In her study, she investigated the relationship among the type of prompts, topics, cohesion and overall quality. Although the prompts she used addressed different topics and my prompts only differed in lexical formation and length but addressed the same topic, the results she found for the relationship between the type of prompts and the use of cohesive devices are similar to the results I found in my study. She concluded that each student wrote in the same way in terms of cohesion for the three different prompts and topics. In brief, the results of Reid's study showed no significant difference between the type of prompts and the use of cohesive devices as in mine. Therefore, my results are consistent with her findings regarding the relationship between the number of the cohesive devices and the type of the prompt.

This finding, however, is inconsistent with what Johns (1986) found in her study. The results of her study indicated that if students comprehended a prompt before they started writing, the writing paper was more cohesive. In brief, the results of Johns' study showed different results from the results I reached in my study. The difference could be caused by the different ways the prompts were used in both studies. She used several prompts for different topics and writing styles in her

writing class. She asked the students to ‘deconstruct’ and ‘reconstruct’ the prompt. In addition, she asked comprehension questions about the prompt to ensure that the students comprehended what the prompt asked for. Then, she asked her students to rewrite the prompt by using their own words. After that, she analyzed the cohesive devices in students’ writing. The way I used the prompts was different from hers. I used two different prompts for the same topic in a timed exam. As a result, the way Johns conducted her study was completely different from the method I conducted my study.

The purpose of the third research question was to investigate the relationship between the frequencies of cohesive devices occurred in the essays written for the traditional prompt and thought provoking prompt and the overall quality of the essays written for the two prompts measured by means of holistic scoring. The results obtained by conducting the Pearson correlation indicated a low correlation between the frequency of the cohesive devices and the overall quality of the essays written for both the traditional and thought provoking prompts. The low correlation suggested that cohesion did not seem to contribute to the overall quality of ESL academic essay writing. On the other hand, further analysis of the data suggested that the relationship between the frequency of cohesive devices and the overall quality seemed to be different for the students with different writing ability.

The results I found for the third research question support De Beaugrande and Dressler’s (1981) argument. They stated that cohesion and coherence and unity of a text had to be studied separately as cohesive devices were the components of the surface text, whereas coherence and unity which are the components of overall

quality were the components which underlie the surface text. In brief, they suggest no relationship between cohesion and overall quality and its components.

A similar view was expressed by Carrell (1982). She argued that cohesion was not the indicator of a good or poor quality of a written text. She claimed that cohesion did not indicate what a text meant but it showed how a text was semantically constructed. The results I found supported this view as well. In my study, the essays which got high scores for overall quality did not show a difference in the frequency of cohesive devices. This indicates that the students who got high grades and were successful in organization and the connections between and among the sentences and paragraphs did not use more cohesive devices. As a result, my study indicates that the quality of writing is not necessarily improved by the using more cohesive devices.

### Pedagogical Implications

The results of the study showed that prompts have an important role in the overall quality of EFL writing. One of the implications is that the construction of a prompt needs to be considered carefully. The lexical formation and information load should be taken into consideration to avoid unclear or vague focus of the topic and to avoid ambiguous wording which can cause misinterpretations and hence badly organized writing.

Moreover, while constructing a prompt, the familiarity of the prompt, that is, what students already know about the topic should be taken into account. This should also be considered because a prompt functions as a stimulus to activate background knowledge of students. Activating appropriate background knowledge

in EFL writing can help students pay more attention to content construction and discourse structure of the text that they produce.

The third implication is that classroom teachers and testers should be trained for certain methods of writing prompts as prompts are frequently used for assessment or teaching purposes. Methods of writing prompts should focus on its wording, information load and the students' familiarity with the topic. Students should practice to make maximum use of the information provided to them in the prompt.

Finally, different types of prompts should be used in writing and testing classes to let students gain a scope of comprehending different kinds of prompts which lead to different topics and require different discourse structure.

Although my study showed that cohesion did not seem to contribute to the overall writing quality, the relationship between the use of cohesive devices and the overall quality is worth considering. As the further analysis of the data suggested, the relationship between cohesion and overall quality is not linear. Thus, cohesion may play a role in the quality of writing, but via coherence and unity, which are the main components of overall quality. Therefore, cohesion, coherence and unity should also be practiced in writing classrooms to improve overall quality of EFL writing. The cohesive devices need to be taken as a dynamic concept rather than a mechanical link within and between sentences. Instead of making students memorize the cohesive devices and their places in a text, students should learn the usage and function of them in a text. With a deductive perspective, students can practice constructing a text piece by piece, that is, they need to study the ideas to be expressed in the text first and then use cohesion by bringing those ideas together and by using appropriate semantic ties within and between them. Maintaining the link



between the ideas and thoughts together in a meaningful way, students can perform better in writing in terms of overall quality.

#### Limitations of The Study and Implication for The Further Research

One of the limitations of my study was the time interval between the two classroom applications of the study. Although it did not affect the results about the relationship between the two prompts and the overall quality, and that part of the study met what had been expected, the time interval was shorter than it should have been. The time interval between the two applications should have been long enough in order not to let the students remember what the topic was exactly about. On the other hand, the time interval should not be too long to let the students show progress in their language and writing abilities.

For further research, the scope of the study should be broadened. Studies should be done with more participants and at different institutions. The prompts can be varied in topic and form. Test analysis should include not only cohesive devices but T-units as well. Also, studies should be carried out with students at different proficiency levels to be able to make generalizations about the role of prompts in writing and their effect on cohesion and overall quality in EFL writing. The study I carried out was conducted with advanced EFL students. Therefore, data from the beginner, pre-intermediate, intermediate level EFL students should also be collected to arrive at more generalizable results.

Last but not least, as the further analysis of the data in my study suggested the relationship between cohesion and overall quality was to be different for students with different writing ability, further studies must be done to investigate the relationship between the two variables in greater detail.

Future research should also analyze the cohesive devices individually because the role of the different cohesive devices could be different in a text. Moreover, investigating kinds of cohesive devices can enable researchers to obtain more detailed information about the role of cohesion in EFL writing. Finally, in this study, the use of cohesive devices was analyzed at sentence level. Future research, however, should go beyond that and analyze the role of cohesive devices at pragmatic and discourse levels. This can help the researcher investigate the role of the cohesive devices in writing in various aspects.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

Daniel Kies  
College of DuPage  
Department of English  
Composition English 101

#### SENTENCE COHESION

To achieve cohesion, the link of one sentence to the next, consider the following techniques:

- 1) Repetition: In sentence B (the second of any two sentences), repeat a word from sentence A.
- 2) Synonymy: If direct repetition is too obvious, use a synonym of the word you wish to repeat. This strategy is called 'elegant variation'.
- 3) Antonymy: Using the 'opposite' word, an antonym, can also create a sense of cohesion since in language antonyms actually share more elements than you can imagine.
- 4) Pro-forms: Use a pro-noun, pro-verb, or another pro-form to make explicit reference to refer to a form mentioned earlier.
- 5) Collocation: Use a commonly paired or expected or highly probable word to connect one sentence to another.
- 6) Enumeration: Use overt markers of sequence to highlight the connection between ideas. This system has many advantages: a) it can link ideas that are otherwise completely unconnected, b) it looks formal and distinctive, and c) it promotes a second method of sentence cohesion, discussed in 7.

- 7) **Parallelism:** Repeat a sentence structure. This technique is the oldest, most overlooked, but probably the most elegant method of creating cohesion.
- 8) **Transitions:** Use a conjunction or conjunctive adverb to link sentences with particular logical relationships.
- a) **Identity:** Indicates sameness.  
e.g. that is, that is to say, in other words, ...
  - b) **Opposition:** Indicates a contrast.  
e.g. but, yet, however, nevertheless, still, though, although, whereas, in contrast, rather,...
  - c) **Addition:** Indicates continuation.  
e.g. and, too, also, furthermore, moreover, in addition, besides, in the same way, again, another, similarly, the same,...
  - d) **Cause and effect:** Indicates reason and result.  
e.g. therefore, so, consequently, as a consequence, thus, hence, it follows that, because, since, for,...
  - e) **Indefinites:** Indicates a logical connection of an unspecified type.  
e.g. in fact, indeed, now,...
  - f) **Concession:** Indicates a willingness to consider the other side.  
e.g. admittedly, I admit, I grant, of course, naturally, some believe, some people believe, it has been claimed that, once it was believed, there are those who would say,...



g) Exemplification: Indicates a shift from a more general or abstract idea to a more specific or concrete idea.

e.g. for example, for instance, after all, an illustration of, even,  
indeed, in fact, it is true, of course, specifically, to be specific,  
that is, to illustrate, truly,...

## Appendix B

## Holistic Grading Scale

5	<p>Very</p> <p>Good</p>	<p>*Title present, contains relevant topic word/s, reflects the aspect of the topic that will be dealt with and is written in the correct form.</p> <p>* Introductory, body (at least one paragraph) and concluding Paragraphs present and:</p> <p>1. Introductory paragraph starts with a general statement, anecdote, quotation or question, etc., making the purpose of the essay clear, and is smoothly narrowed down to the thesis statement. The thesis statement contains a clearly stated topic word/phrase, includes key terms that will be developed in the body paragraphs and reflects the discourse pattern used in the essay.</p> <p>2. Each body paragraph has a topic sentence including the full topic word/phrase(s) mentioned in the thesis statement, and a controlling idea. The body paragraphs are in order corresponding to the topic word/phrase(s) mentioned in the thesis statement. The topic sentence has been sufficiently supported via the use of specific details and/or examples. All supporting ideas are completely relevant to the given topic; key word/phrase(s) exploited in the paragraph; all ideas are credible. Connectedness (through repetition, rephrasing or referencing) is maintained in the whole paragraph. Appropriate and varied use of connectors.</p> <p>3. The topic sentence of the concluding paragraph rephrases the thesis statement, and in the rest of the paragraph, one of the following methods is used: summarizing, making a prediction, stating an opinion. Appropriate length (well balanced when compared to the introduction). No new topic is brought up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall: Connectedness maintained throughout the whole essay. Appropriate in style to the required discourse pattern. Free from grammatical errors (one or two minor mistakes are acceptable).</li> </ul>
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4	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Title present, but may not be appropriate.</li> <li>* Introductory, body (at least one paragraph) and concluding paragraphs present and:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introductory paragraph starts with a general statement anecdote, quotation or question, etc., making the purpose of the essay clear, thesis statement present, but transition from introduction to thesis statement may be abrupt. The thesis statement contains a clearly stated topic word/phrase, includes key terms that will be developed in the body paragraphs and reflects the discourse pattern used in the essay.</li> <li>2. Each body paragraph has a topic sentence including the full topic word/phrase(s) mentioned in the thesis statement, and a controlling idea. The body paragraphs are in order corresponding to the topic word/phrase(s) mentioned in the thesis statement. The topic sentence has been sufficiently supported via the use of specific details and/or examples. Almost all supporting ideas are completely relevant to the given topic; key word/phrase(s) exploited in the paragraph; all ideas are credible. Connectedness (through repetition, rephrasing or referencing) is maintained throughout most of the paragraph. One or two connectors may be missing or misused.</li> <li>4. The topic sentence of the concluding paragraph rephrases the thesis statement, and in the rest of the paragraph, one of the following methods is used: summarizing the main points of the essay, suggesting a solution, offering a solution, making a prediction, stating an opinion. Length may not be well balanced when compared to the introduction. An opinion may suggest a new topic relevant to the topic.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Overall:             <p>Connectedness maintained throughout most of the essay.</p> <p>Mostly appropriate in style to the required discourse pattern.</p> <p>Grammatical errors in about one fourth of the essay not affecting communication.</p> <p>A good range of vocabulary.</p> </li> </ul>
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3	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Title missing, or present but inappropriate.</li> <li>* Introductory, body (at least one paragraph) and concluding paragraphs present and:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introductory paragraph starts with a general statement anecdote, quotation or question, etc., making the purpose of the essay clear, thesis statement present, but transition from introduction to thesis statement may be inadequately done, the order of information not logical, some irrelevant may be added. The thesis statement contains a clearly stated topic word/phrase, includes key terms that will be developed in the body paragraphs and reflects the discourse pattern used in the essay.</li> <li>2. Each body paragraph has a topic sentence including the full topic word/phrase(s) mentioned in the thesis statement, and a controlling idea. The body paragraphs may not correspond to order of the topic word/phrase(s) mentioned in the thesis statement. One third of supporting ideas may not be relevant to the given topic; lack of variety of ideas. Connectedness (through repetition, rephrasing or referencing) is maintained at least two-thirds of the paragraph. Some connectors may be missing or misused.</li> <li>3. The concluding paragraph may not have a proper topic sentence. Length may not be well balanced when compared to the introduction. Appropriate methods of concluding may not be used. Some opinions may suggest new topics.</li> </ol> </li> <li>* Overall:               <p>Connectedness maintained in at least two-thirds of the essay.</p> <p>Mostly appropriate in style to the required discourse pattern.</p> <p>Grammatical errors in about half of the essay not affecting communication.</p> <p>Limited range of vocabulary, mostly appropriate.</p> </li> </ul>
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2	Weak	<p>Near to adequate level in general scope, but inadequate because of one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) numerous grammatical errors causing the reader to have problems in making out the message,</li> <li>b) too elementary in approach; obvious lack of basic essay writing skills, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the introduction is not clear (e.g. many vague ideas not leading to a specific topic)</li> <li>• no thesis statement,</li> <li>• the so-called thesis statement does not signal the rest of the essay,</li> <li>• or any one of the introductory, body or concluding paragraphs missing.</li> </ul> </li> <li>c) serious irrelevance to the given topic, i.e., does not answer the given topic but some other aspect of it,</li> <li>d) too short,</li> <li>e) not in essay form (i.e., paragraphs not indicated by spacing/indentation).</li> </ul>
1	Very Poor	<p>Lack of basic knowledge of English is obvious.  Unaware of basic paragraph/essay conventions.  Complete lack of those features essential to the type of essay required.</p>

### Appendix C Background Questionnaire

1. First name (and second name): \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Last name : \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Gender : \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Age : \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Native language : \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Other languages you know  
in addition to your native  
language and English : \_\_\_\_\_
  7. The language of instruction  
at high school : \_\_\_\_\_
  8. The grade that is received  
from the English Language  
Proficiency Exam  
administered by METU : \_\_\_\_\_
- (If you have answered question 8, please skip question 9)
9. The grade that is received  
from TOEFL or an  
equivalent language  
proficiency exam : TOEFL Grade : \_\_\_\_\_  
  
or an equivalent exam:  
Name of the exam: \_\_\_\_\_  
Grade : \_\_\_\_\_
  10. Name and code of the  
current writing course : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Traditional and Thought Provoking Prompts

In writing tests or classroom activities, the stimulus that students have to produce their written product is called a prompt (Kroll & Reid, 1994).

I have classified writing prompts into two: traditional and thought provoking.

Traditional prompts can be defined as the ones which usually provide students with little information. This information may cause students to produce something completely different from what their teachers or testers expect them to write; or, this type of a prompt may not have a focus due to its wording so that students may not get enough guidance out of it. In addition, this type of prompt seems to lack an opportunity for students to think about what they are to write; i.e., students usually do not have much chance to activate their schemata when they read the given prompt.

A traditional prompt may also be given in a way that it limits students' creativity and expects students to produce stereotype essays.

Thought provoking prompts, on the other hand, can be defined as the prompts which helps students more by activating their knowledge and giving them a chance to think over the topic that they are to write. These prompts also try to provide flexibility to a certain extent as they are expected to focus on a particular point including their own thoughts and ideas in the given topic.

Thinking of the explanations above which prompts given below would you consider as traditional and thought provoking prompts? You can categorize them by putting related numbers under the headings. Please itemize your reasons if you decide that there is such a difference.

**PROMPTS:**

- 1) Write an essay in which you argue for or against English being a compulsory subject in all schools and universities in Turkey.
- 2) Think about the English language courses you have been taking since you started the prep school. Do you think that having compulsory English language education is necessary for university level studies? Considering these questions and thinking about your own situation, experience and feelings, write an essay in which you argue for or against English being a compulsory subject in several schools and universities in Turkey. Do not forget to support your reasons in detail, and make your own position clear in the argument.
- 3) Describe the ways in which a person's social or professional life can be affected by a free time activity.
- 4) Think about one of your hobbies (tennis, computer, chess, a music instrument, mountain climbing, photography, etc.). How does this hobby take up your time? How do you think your involvement with this activity affects your social and school life? Considering the questions above write an essay of 250-300 words in which you discuss how a student's social or school life can be affected by a free time activity. Do not forget to support your reasons in detail and describe your own situation clearly.
- 5) Write an essay in which you argue for or against keeping animals in zoos.
- 6) Think about animals which are kept in captivity (your or your friend's pet, an elephant in a zoo, a goldfish in an aquarium, etc.). How do you feel about them? Do you think it is right or wrong to keep them in captivity? Thinking of these questions,



your experience and feelings , Write an essay in which you argue for or against keeping an animal in captivity. Do not forget to support your reasons in detail and make your own position clear in the argument.

7) Write an essay in which you compare a modern hero with a classical one.

8) There are some people in the world who are accepted as heroes. Who do you accept as a classical and modern hero? What do you think the differences between both types are and what are the reasons for the differences? Thinking of these questions write an essay in which you discuss how you think the conception of classical hero has changed into today's conceptions of heroes. Do not forget to support your reasons in detail by giving plenty of illustrations and make your own preference between the two clear to the reader.

9) Write an essay in which you describe what one can do to have a long and healthy life.

10) Imagine a person who you would describe as a healthy person. How do you think that person has become healthy and keeps him/herself healthy? Thinking of these questions, your own experience and feelings, write an essay in which you discuss what a person can do to have a healthy and long life. Do not forget to support your ideas in detail by giving plenty of illustrations and to make your own situation clear while discussing the subject.

**TRADITIONAL PROMPT (TP)  
PROMPT(TPP)**

**THOUGHT PROVOKING**

**YOUR REASONS FOR:**

**TP**

**TPP**

## Appendix E

## Checklist for the Cohesive Devices

<b>REPETITION</b>		
<b>SYNONYMY</b>		
<b>ANTONYMY</b>		
<b>PRO-FORMS:</b> pro-verb, pro-noun, etc.		
<b>COLLOCATION</b>		
<b>ENUMERATION</b>		
<b>PARALLELISM</b>		
Repetition of a sentence		
Structure		
	<b>CORRECTLY USED</b>	<b>INCORRECTLY USED</b>
<b>TRANSITIONS:</b>		
<b>Identity:</b> that is,in other words, that is to say, etc.		
<b>Opposition:</b> but,yet,however, though,although,still,etc.		
<b>Addition:</b> and,too,similarly,in addition,also,furthermore, etc.		
<b>Cause and effect:</b> thus,hence, therefore,so,consequently,etc.		
<b>Indefinites:</b> in fact, indeed, now,etc.		
<b>Concession:</b> admittedly,I admit, some believe,of course,etc.		
<b>Exemplification:</b> for example, for instance,to illustrate,etc.		
<b>TOTAL:</b>		

## Appendix F

### Questionnaire About The Prompts

- 1 ) Write an essay in which you argue for or against English being a compulsory subject in several schools and universities in Turkey.
- 2) In several schools and universities in Turkey, English is a compulsory subject. Think about the English courses you have been taking since you started this school. Do you think taking English language courses plays an important role in a person's education? Do you think that having compulsory English language education is necessary for university level studies? Considering these questions and thinking about your own situation, experience and feelings, write an essay in which you argue for or against English being a compulsory subject in several schools and universities in Turkey. Do not forget to support your reasons in detail, and make your own position clear in the argument.

You have written an essay for each prompt mentioned above. Please circle your choice(s) in the following questions about your comments on those prompts:

1. Please decide which prompt was easier for you to write about: 1 2
2. Why? (You can circle more than one choice)
  - A) Its focus was clearer so I understood better what was asked from me to write about.
  - B) It was more thought provoking than the other prompt.
  - C) This prompt made it easier for me to organize my thoughts.
  - D) This prompt increased my familiarity to the topic so I wrote more easily.
3. How often do you write in your native language? (Please circle your choice.)

a) Always    b) Often    c) Sometimes    d) Rarely    e) Never

4. How often do you write in English?

a) Always    b) Often    c) Sometimes    d) Rarely    e) Never

5. Please add your further comments if there are any. (You can use the back of the paper.)